

LADY JEUNE'S SHARP RETORT TO MARIE CORELLI.

LADY JEUNE.

LADY JEUNE has been a prolific and interesting writer on the subject of woman's position in modern society. She is the wife of Sir Francis Jeune, a Judge of the Court of Appeals. When she married Sir Francis, in 1881, she was the widow of Colonel the Hon. John Stanley, brother of Lord Stanley of Alderley. She is a leader of London society. She has championed the cause of women who are seeking to make a living or a career for themselves. She believes that mothers should give their unmarried daughters a reasonable amount of liberty and an opportunity to form their own opinions of masculine character.

A Ringing Protest Against the English Novelist's Bitter Criticism of the Methods of the Modern Marriage Market.

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MARIE CORELLI.

MARIE CORELLI is an authoress who has lately made some remarkable contributions to the sex problem as understood by the new woman. She is a fierce antagonist of the conventional morality which permits a man to do what is ruthlessly punished in a woman. In her recent novel, "The Murder of Delicia," she expressed most strongly her views on this question.

Lately she contributed to the Sunday Journal a vigorous article on loveless marriages as a curse of modern society. Among her best known novels are "A Romance of Two Worlds," "Barabbas" and "The Sorrows of Satan."

THE inevitable controversy as to the improvement or deterioration of one age over another still continues, and no comparison is ever satisfying.

It is so easy to generalize and so difficult when we particularize to arrive at any accurate deduction.

Each age has its vices and weaknesses, which alter according to the condition and influences which are then

existing; and to say that one time is worse or better because the particular characteristics we contemplate have altered or disappeared is misleading.

An idyllic life of peace and contentment, away from the storm and stress of life, is theoretically perfect, but it is perfectly possible for such a life to develop the worst qualities of mankind. Egotism, self-indulgence, indolence and a thousand other weaknesses might ride rampant under such conditions, while in an existence where luxury, wealth and pleasure appeared

to be the sole ambition, some of the noblest virtues of humanity might exist.

Therefore, in generalizing and condemning the weaknesses of the age in which we live, we are apt to form too hasty conclusions of the life which we see around us, and in condemning its weaknesses to lose sight altogether of the higher and better side which lies close beside.

Human nature is stronger than all the forces and influences opposed to it, and it does not alter naturally, though conditions of life and changes modify it. We are always inclined to be pessimistic in comparing the time in which we live to the past. We are always being told that we are more virtuous and brave, more simple and self-reliant; that our women are more beautiful, our men more Spartan and courageous; that modern civilization and the gigantic changes which the nineteenth century has witnessed have demoralized and degraded us, and that the great qualities which inspired the makers of our empire have died away in an effete and worn-out civilization.

If we were to admit the accuracy of all the conclusions the pessimists arrive at, it would still be possible to prove that a "remnant" remains, so fine and wholesome as to mitigate greatly the evils that undoubtedly exist; but we maintain—and it is easy to prove our contention—that they are wrong, and that not only are we not worse than our forefathers in the main, but that our times have called into existence qualities of the highest nature, and which alone could be produced by the particular conditions of to-day.

It is impossible, in the complex life of our time, that there should not be a large and powerful element in society whose influence is not for good. The great wealth and luxury of to-day must produce some effects which are demoralizing and weakening to the characters of those who live under their influence; but every age has had the same evil, though, perhaps, to a less intensified degree. Where there is great wealth there must be great extravagance and display, and, if only controlled and properly directed, its effect must benefit the community. A class of misers is not one that would benefit a country, and, though a lavish expenditure may demoralize a society, it has its benefits in the occupation and wealth it divides among the working classes.

A demand for luxuries means employment to many poor people. Large entertainments, with all their accessories, smart clothes, carriages, and all the adjuncts of wealth which modern moralists condemn, have, after all, some advantages; and those who live in London and work among the poor can truthfully testify to the vast difference in their comfort and prosperity when a season is a good one, and to the severe pinch of poverty when the spending power of the wealthy classes is curtailed. Therefore, while deploring and admitting the evils which are the inevitable result of an age of luxury and expenditure, one cannot help feeling that the genuine outburst against those evils is sometimes exaggerated, because people are too apt to jump to hasty conclusions from a want of carefully analyzing the criticisms they make.

A very powerful indictment against the evils of modern society appeared in these columns from the pen of one of the most popular writers of to-day, and

one who has studied human nature and knows much of the life of to-day; and while admitting that some of her criticisms are accurate, we think she is a little carried away by a righteous feeling of indignation at some evils which belong to every age and society, and which are not in themselves a definite sign of decadence of this. It is very easy to write the word "Sham" across this age, and, by a free, hasty generalization, to condemn it and make it seem as if heroic actions, bravery, boldness, all the manly qualities, have disappeared in a "slothful self-indulgence," and that the aim of our life is to shut our eyes and ears to everything save the gratification of the lowest desires of human nature. We fail to see any signs of such a decadence when we know that for every post of danger and responsibility there are thousands of men ready to volunteer, and glad to serve their country, giving their life for the pay that a well-paid artisan would not look at.

That we have done with the coarseness and brutality of the last century no one will deny. Where there are great riches, a high standard of comfort and luxury and a moneyed class, there must be extravagance and less moral restraint than in a more primitive state, where the conditions of existence are harder and the life is more simple. An existence such as Miss Corelli tells us of is poetical and idyllic to the highest degree; but in our country, and under the conditions of modern society, it is an impossible one; but it does not necessarily follow that a life equally pure and happy is impossible in our modern Babylon.

"Love in a cottage" is a delicious thing, but the whoredom to provide the cottage and its accessories is an absolute necessity. The higher standard of comfort and ease which modern society requires, without any superfluities, make marriage more difficult than formerly, not because there is not the same capacity for affection and self-denial among us, but because the whole conditions of our life have changed and are still changing; and it must be evident to the most Spartan of us that, however simple and rugged may be our theories, it is an impossibility to carry them out in their entirety.

The modern mother is not the heartless, selfish creature described to us, because she shrinks from letting her daughter link her life with some one, however deep her attachment may be, who cannot at least provide her with the necessities of life. We think that Miss Corelli must be mistaken in drawing the picture she has of the "Modern Marriage Market." The same reproaches have always been heaped on society which she makes; women have always been accused of sacrificing their daughters for money, for the sake of the great settlements of a rich husband, and the cry of the "slave market" is as old as the world itself. But is it true?—or, rather, is the accusation not so grossly exaggerated as to be false as if

there were no foundation for its existence? There are, and always have been, women who are sufficiently worldly to be willing to allow and persuade their daughters to marry for the material advantages which a rich husband can provide; but that such women represent the average mother is an accusation we distinctly deny. There are circumstances surrounding marriages which lend some color to the suggestion that girls have sold themselves for money; but such cases are exceptions, and because some may exist, it is false to affirm that all are the same.

In the same way we object and protest most strongly against Miss Corelli's statement that girls are "brought out" in the "season" to be sold as "any unhappy Armenian girl"—a statement as false as it is ridiculous. Does she really believe that the bright, happy, pretty girls we see in London ballrooms all go there for the purpose of exhibiting their charms to the richest and most desirable suitor? Does she think that every girl starts in life with the avowed and open intention of making the best of her looks for such a purpose? We say that such an idea is monstrous and absolutely false of the girls, and equally untrue and unjust as regards their mothers. In the heart of every girl lies the hope that some day she may have the man she loves, and, in joining her life with his, taste the sweet joys of life together; but that thought is one quite apart and outside any of the motives which make her wish to go into the world or add to the enjoyment of her season.

All girls enjoy society because of the fun, the gaiety, the change, and the wholesome excitement which a season gives them, and not because in the distance they see the millions and the millionaire they are supposed to be hunting. Take any young, wholesome-minded girl with a happy home, and suggest such a thing and see her indignant denial of an accusation the thought of which has never darkened the pleasure and fun of her life. Take such girls in ballrooms or in following any of the amusements they like, listening to their hearty laugh and watching the bright, happy expression of their faces, and the zest with which they throw themselves into all they do, and then let any one honestly say whether they see a trace of or believe in the influences which Miss Corelli tells us are sapping all that is pure and sweet in their nature.

Girls think and act for themselves, and have their own most distinct ideas on all subjects, quite apart from those to whom they belong, and any mother, unless she were a woman without affection for her child, would find it very difficult—nay, almost impossible—to force her daughter to marry a man solely because he was hugely rich. With a gentle, docile nature, and without much strength of character, a vile persuasion, or even stronger measures, might

affect something, but the majority of girls could not be forced to take such a step; and we will go still further, and say that there are, we believe, very few women who would urge their daughters to.

Girls may marry hastily, perhaps marry too young, without knowing their own minds, but in these days no girl is forced into a marriage that is repugnant to her because her mother wishes it, and there are few women wicked and cruel enough

to blast the life of their child by acting as Miss Corelli would have us believe they do. Every year the increased independence which girls enjoy, and the feeling of the time in which they live, makes them less anxious to marry, or to marry so early; and their position with regard to men and the rules of camaraderie which exist between the young of both sexes do not tend to increase a girl's desire to take a husband. Miss Corelli says truly, "Nature will not be balked of her rights; she gives us brains to think, hearts wherewith to feel, emotions to respond to every touch of human tenderness and sympathy, minds to educate in such wise they should be able to grasp and realize all the dear and holy responsibilities of life;" and because it is so it is also true that modern thought and education make mothers realize those responsibilities with regard to their children and so refrain from using any influence except what tends to their happiness, and has also made girls understand the profanation and wickedness of a loveless marriage.

We can hardly believe that the little sketch of a water-side proposal which she gives us is in any way descriptive of any class of society. We cannot, of course, presume to guess how the question is asked or answered, the question that is old as time and yet sweet and fresh as the Spring flowers, but we are certain Miss Corelli does not know either, and we cannot suppose she expects us to take the two actors in her little comedy as typical of English life and manners, for, however barren a marriage may be of any sentiment or passion, we hardly think it possible a proposal could be conveyed in such language or accepted in a like fashion. We cannot help feeling that Miss Corelli generalizes too much, and takes a class, and a very small class, as typical of the whole English society.

If what she says is the case, the society in which we live is corrupt and rotten to the core, and the consequences to which it is tending must be utterly disastrous. But we are sure she is wrong—wrong in her facts and her conclusions. There are spots on the sun, and there is no such thing as an ideal society. Perfection in this world is what we are all striving after, and which, like the magician's stone, is not to be found. Our ideals are high, if we do not attain to them, and no English woman could we imagine admit that the picture which Miss Corelli draws of the English is correct. We do not deny that there have been and may be cases such as she describes in a society which represents only a very small feature of English life, and is, in no sense of the word, representative.

There have been mercenary, selfish women since the creation of the world, and to some natures the temptations which wealth offers will always be irresistible. But because this may be true of a few, it is unjust to brand and condemn all English women, as she is prepared to do. We may be more selfish, more luxurious, than formerly, and the weaknesses engendered by such influences may be more openly acknowledged and recognized; still, we maintain unhesitatingly that English women of to-day are no less governed by the sentiments of affection and passion than their ancestors, and are just as ready to join their lives with those of the men they love. Every day we see men and women in every class marrying who have neither great wealth nor even the prospect of it, but who are content to lead lives of self-denial, consecrated by that love, the very best and purest of which human nature is capable, and which will never be tarnished or destroyed by any of the changes which affect the more notable affairs of life.

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"If the society in which we live is rotten to the core, the consequences must be utterly disastrous."

"The mass of English men and women are as strong and morally pure as their predecessors."

"Women have always been accused of sacrificing their daughters for a rich husband."